

# In crisis-torn Sahel, UN anti-drugs and crime agency helps bolster justice system

Africa's vast Sahel – plagued by humanitarian crises, armed conflict and terrorism – is now witnessing improvements in its criminal justice system thanks to a special programme by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), which assists Governments in the region to come together to fight corruption, and human and drug trafficking.

Africa's vast Sahel – plagued by humanitarian [crises](#), armed conflict and terrorism – is now witnessing improvements in its criminal justice system thanks to a special programme by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime ([UNODC](#)), which assists Governments in the region to come together to fight corruption, and human and drug trafficking.

The impact of the Governments' commitment is evident through an increase in the number of seizures, greater cooperation and innovative judicial solutions, [says](#) Pierre Lapaque, the regional head for West and Central Africa at UNODC.

“UNODC has witnessed positive systemic change in the region in the past years. We are seeing an increase in national and regional ownership, which positively impacts the security situation in the Sahel,” he highlighted.

According to the UN agency, for 2017 alone, law enforcement officers based in the airports of Bamako (Mali), Niamey (Niger) and Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso) have seized over 35 kilograms (77 pounds) of drugs and over \$1 million in foreign currencies.

Just two weeks ago, in early February, Joint Airport Interdiction Task Force agents in Ouagadougou proceeded to the seizure of 4.8 kg of heroin, off a single passenger.

On the judicial side as well as, Government efforts are yielding results. Last year, Niger secured its first two convictions for terrorist financing involving eight suspects, and a third conviction for participation in terrorist acts, involving one suspect.

Furthermore, supported by UNODC and UN volunteers (UNVs), Nigerien judicial authorities processed some 230 cases involving terrorism suspects days last spring.

## **Combatting corruption; building trust**

Supported by UNODC, Governments are also making strides in the battle against corruption.

Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania and Niger have already ratified the [UN Convention against Corruption](#), and Chad is currently taking steps towards ratification.

In addition, anti-corruption laws are being developed in countries and increasingly more number of cases are being investigated and transferred to justice systems.

The combination of these efforts are also helping nations in implementing the commitments under the [2030 Agenda](#) for Sustainable Development, especially its Sustainable Development [Goal 16](#) on providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

Furthermore, strong respect for human rights and gender equality are the fundamental underpinnings of its assistance programmes, affirmed UNODC.

### **More than 10,000 direct beneficiaries reached**

Since 2014, UNODC's [Sahel Programme](#) has reached over 10,000 direct beneficiaries through the implementation of more than 400 activities ranging from legislative assistance to the provision of equipment, or from practical training workshop to high level meetings, both at national and regional levels.

During this time, UNODC has also forced close cooperation and coordination with a wide range of partners, including UN missions, the G5 Sahel, European Union, the Civil Society and others. The Programme also complements the UN Integrated Strategy for Sahel (UNISS) by building on the progress already made in the past years, and by realigning the UNISS' objectives with 2030 Agenda 2030 and the SDGs.

"We make a point of getting our partners as involved as possible, to ensure that our Programme meets their needs, their objectives and their priorities," expressed Mr. Lapaque.